

“What matters most to me is whether my home community is energy independent, and it’s not.” With these words, Rep. Marcy Kaptur challenged regional stakeholders in the biofuels industry to establish Toledo and northwest Ohio as a center for biofuels research. Her challenge to the group, which was assembled by CIFT, was, “I want you to put together a team and work together on a vision that we can carry forward – a research horizon. I will not be satisfied until you come back to me and say “this is where we want to go.”

The meeting was held September 24 at the offices of the American Maritime Officers in Toledo. It was convened and organized by the Center for Innovative Food Technology through its Northern Ohio Energy Crop Center (NOECC) that identifies and facilitates research geared toward identifying opportunities for northern Ohio organizations and institutions to participate in alternate energy projects.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss problems that confront independent regional biofuels producers and to set a research agenda to address them. Three independent regional biodiesel producers were represented at the meeting, and each discussed their operations, economic challenges that faced them, needs for technical and governmental support, and opportunities for regional producers to “level the playing field.”

Representatives from other organizations and companies in the region also attended to discuss the future of the biofuels industry from their own perspectives. The Ohio Soybean Council, Ohio Department of Agriculture, The Andersons, G.A. Wintzer & Sons, Sunrise Cooperative, American Cooperative Renewable Energy, Rupp Seed Company, TARTA, and the Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority also attended. Rebecca Singer, the Associate Program Director at CIFT, explained, “Our goal was to discuss the biofuels industry from as many different perspectives as possible, and this group did that very well.” She continued, “We were able to discuss production costs, feedstock pricing, processing technology, alternate fuel sources, distribution issues, and many other elements.”

In addition to CIFT personnel, faculty members from The University of Toledo were in attendance. Researchers from the Department of Chemical Engineering, the Department of Plant Science, as well as from the University’s Lake Erie Center listened to the discussions. Together with CIFT, they will use the meeting to develop a list of potential projects that can help the industry regionally. This list will constitute a “roadmap” for a strategy to move the industry forward. It will be presented to the group at a future meeting. In the meantime, copies of all presentations, as well as the minutes of the meeting, will be distributed to meeting participants and interested personnel.